



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The Cherubim and the Ark.—By DR. T. C. FOOTE, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md.

IN the seventeenth century, the Bishop of Geneva, Francis de Sales, wrote a controversial book in support of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic church, in which he based the edifice of the Papal Supremacy on the letters of some of the earliest popes. In the last century these letters have been proved unauthentic, and Roman controversialists no longer support their contention by an appeal to the 'Forged Decretals.' Yet the edifice which was built upon them continues to stand as securely as ever, and new proofs, in the shape of Christ's words to Peter, are adduced in its support.

The case of the Babylonian origin of the Hebrew cherubim is in a way quite analogous. In the 2^d ed. of Schrader's *Cuneiform Inscriptions and the O. T.*, the identification of the cherubim with the bull and lion colossi at the entrance of Assyrian and Babylonian temples, rests upon a supposed discovery by Lenormant of an amulet on which *kirubu damqu* 'good cherub' takes the place of the customary *šedu damqu* 'good protecting spirit'; and also on an attempt of Delitzsch to restore an epithet of the bull god, as *kuru[bu]*.

In the 3^d ed. of KAT, published in 1903, Delitzsch's emendation is declared untenable (Brünnow having shown that the most natural restoration is *kuru-u*), and Lenormant's discovery is shown to have been, to put it very mildly, an error. And even if this word *kurubu* were certain, it would only mean, as Kittel has pointed out, that the bull god was called a cherub, and not that a cherub was a bull god. But strange to say, these failures at anything approaching to proof make no difference whatever, and Zimmern asserts (KAT³ p. 529) that the identification may be considered certain! Delitzsch also in *Babel and Bible* gives a picture of the bull colossus and names it a 'cherub.' This identification is, therefore, archeological, and rests on certain supposed resemblances. Before considering these resemblances, it is first necessary to inquire what is the Hebrew conception of the cherub.

Of the places where these symbolic creatures are mentioned in the Bible, perhaps six are pre-exilic passages. But these passages are none of them early, being conceded to be about the time of the second stratum of J, i. e., about 650 B.C. The first three of these passages belong to J².

Of these we may mention first the cherubim of Gen. 3, 24, placed by JHVH at the east of the garden of Eden to keep the way of the tree of life.

Then there are three passages, namely I Sa. 4, 4, II Sa. 6, 2,¹ and II Ki. 19, 15, to which may be added a later passage, Is. 37, 16, containing the expression **יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרוּבִים** 'sitting or enthroned upon the cherubim.'

In I Ki. 6, 23-35 is a description of the colossal cherubim made by Solomon for the **רִכְיִז** or most holy place in the temple—two cherubs with wings outspread, overshadowing the place where the ark was to stand. Also there is a description of the ornamentation of the walls and doors of the temple with alternate cherubim, palm trees and open flowers.

In I Ki. 7, 29, 36, the bases of bronze are described as ornamented with cherubim, oxen and lions.

In I Ki. 8, 6, 7, the ark is said to have been placed 'under the wings of the cherubim, and the cherubim covered the ark.'

There is no doubt that these passages from Kings contain several later additions, but following Stade, Burney and others, we may take it for granted that the statement, that there were cherubim in Solomon's temple whose wings covered the ark, belongs to pre-exilic literature.

In these passages the cherubim act as 'coverers,' or protectors, and closely allied to this is the idea of 'keepers,' as in Gen. 3, 24.

But in the expression **יְהוָה יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרוּבִים** 'JHVH Sabaoth sitting upon the cherubim,' the idea is not so clear. Smend, e. g., in his *Religionsgeschichte* (p. 24 f.) maintains that it never refers to God riding on the cherub, but rather to the cherubs as watchers of the heavenly throne. Burney (p. 344) thinks the reference is primarily to the presence of the **שְׂכִינָה** above the **כִּפֹּרֶת**, or mercy seat, in the innermost sanctuary of

¹ The parallel passage in I Chr. 13, 6, as well as the passages in Chron. parallel to Kings have not been noted, inasmuch as they add nothing.

the temple. But taken in connection with the expressions found in the Psalms, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the cherubim are regarded as the throne on which *יהוה* sits.

In the Psalms we come to a somewhat later period, as it is well known that probably all the Psalms are exilic or post-exilic.

In Ps. 18, 10, 'He rode upon a cherub and did fly, yea He flew swiftly upon the wings of the wind.' Here the parallelism shows that the symbolism of the winged cherub is the winged wind. With this must be compared Is. 19, 1 (c. 598 B.C.) '*יהוה* rideth upon a swift cloud;' Ps. 104, 3, 'Who maketh the clouds His chariot and walketh upon the wings of the wind.' Also Jer. 4, 13, 'Behold He shall come up as clouds and His chariots as the whirlwind. His horses are swifter than eagles.'¹ Cf. also Math. 26, 64, 'Ye shall see the Son of man . . coming on the clouds of heaven,' *ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ*.

In Ps. 80, 1, 'Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock: Thou that sittest upon the cherubim, shine forth.' Here the symbolism is that of *יהוה* as the Shepherd and Leader of His people, with the added idea of shining forth as if to guide by night. With this compare the numerous passages in the Pentateuch, several of which are in JE, where *יהוה* descends in a cloud and guides His people, as is described in Ps. 78, 14 'In the daytime He led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light of fire.' In Ezekiel, just before the description of the cherubim we read that *יהוה* appears (as in Ex. 20) in a storm cloud, and as it draws near, the prophet perceives that the cloud was the cherubim.

In Ps. 99, 1, '*יהוה* reigneth; let the people tremble: He sitteth upon the cherubim, let the earth be moved.' Here the cherubim are associated with awe-inspiring majesty; and we may compare Ps. 97, 2, 'Clouds and darkness are round about Him . . a fire goeth before Him and burneth up His enemies.' Also Rev. 14, 14, 'And I saw, and behold a white cloud; and on the cloud one sitting like unto a son of man, having on His head a golden crown and in His hand a sharp sickle.'

In Ezekiel the cherubim appear as creatures with four faces and with two faces. In Ez. 1, the cherubs form a chariot or throne which is described as resembling a cloud emitting light-

¹ Cf. with this the eagle face of the cherub in Ez. 1.

ning and thunder.¹ In ch. 41, 18, the cherubs appear, as in Solomon's temple, as wall ornaments, with a palm tree between each two cherubs, which are conventionally represented with two heads, a man's and a lion's, each facing a palm tree.

Finally in Ez. 28, 14, 16, in a passage which is probably corrupt, we find the idea of covering emphasized: 'O covering cherub.' Professor Toy considers the word הַסֹּכֵךְ 'covering,' 'protecting,' to be a gloss to bring this figure into connection with the cherub of Solomon's temple, as in I Ki. 8, 7, where the 'cherubim covered the ark;' and also in the Priestly account of the ark the cherubim spread out their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings (Ex. 37, 9). If the word in Ezekiel be a gloss, it still serves to show that the idea of 'covering' was commonly associated with the cherub.

From these passages it seems quite clear that the symbolism of the cherub is the cloud. Kittel, Smend, Ryle and others have pointed out that the cherub is symbolical of the storm cloud, but this is only part of its symbolism. It is true that the cherub represents the driving storm cloud upon which JHVH rides, accompanied by thunder and lightning, and striking the beholder with terror, but the cherub also symbolizes the cloud that covers, sheltering from the heat and blessing the land with showers. The double signification of the cherubim is analogous to that of water; the overwhelming flood is a symbol of awe-inspiring might, while the dew and rain typify blessing. In like manner the cherubim at the east of Eden are typical of the divine displeasure, and the cherubim upon which JHVH rides are parallel to the storm cloud upon which He appears in Ezekiel 1, and also the awe-inspiring manifestations at Horeb.

I may say, in regard to the cherubim eastward of Eden, with whom is associated the flame of a sword turning in every direction, that I believe they are symbolical of a terrific electrical storm. The noise of the cherub's wings in Ez. 1, 24, 10, 5, is described as the thunder of JHVH's voice on Sinai; so Ben-zinger, I Kg. 6, 28; Marti, *Kurzer Hand-Commentar*, p. 37,

¹ Professor Haupt, in the Eng. trans. of Ez. in the *Polychrome Bible*, makes the very plausible suggestion that, in this vision of Ezekiel, the prophet meant that the *whirlwind* is JHVH's chariot. He therefore states that he heard the wheels (the chariot) called *whirlers*.

and Bertholet, Ez. 10, 20. The flame of a sword has long been identified with flashes of lightning; cf. also the lightning issuing from the fire in the midst of the cherubim, in Ez. 1, 13; and the lack of connection between the lightning and any living creature makes this explanation not unlikely. The Hebrew verb used for 'placing' the cherubim **יָשַׁב** has been felt to be inappropriate to the common explanation of the passage, and Ball's *Genesis* (SBOT) followed by Ges.-Buhl, HWB¹⁸, proposes to read **יָשָׁם** 'he set up.' But **שָׁבַן** is the verb that is used of the fiery cloud abiding on Sinai, Ex. 24, 16, and of the cloud descending and abiding on the tabernacle during the marches in the wilderness (cf. Nu. 9, 17, 22, 10, 12). Hence it is not improbable that the means used to terrify Adam was a thunder storm which would seem to fill the whole horizon. It is to be noted that there is no mention of any gate or entrance to the garden, and hence one might reach the tree of life from various directions; and it would require something which seemed to fill the whole horizon to make approach seem impossible.

Quite distinct from this symbolism of the cherubim is that of the representations in the most holy place in Solomon's temple, and upon the ark in the Priestly code. It is to be noted that the cherub is preëminently a *winged* creature, and the common position of the wings (as in the places referred to) is outspread so as to form a covering. This symbolism recalls such passages as Ru. 2, 12, 'יְהוָה . . . under whose wings thou art come to take refuge,' Ps. 17, 8, 'Hide me under the shadow of thy wings,' 36, 7, 'The children of men take refuge under the shadow of thy wings,' 60, 7, 'In the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.' So in Solomon's temple the ark is placed 'under the wings of the cherubim.'

In connection with this aspect of the cherubim it may be noted that Professor Haupt some years ago suggested that the name **כְּרוּב** might go back to a Babylonian *karûbu* 'gracious,' as an epithet of the winged creatures beside the palm trees (see Paterson's *Numbers*, p. 46). But such a name for a winged creature cannot be found in Babylonian monuments.

It still remains to speak of the passages just alluded to where the cherub, palm tree, and open flower occur in alternation in the ornamental work of Solomon's temple. On the bronze bases the cherub appears in alternation with oxen and lions. Here

we seem to have simply conventional designs with no especial connection between the various symbols, any more than there is between the alternate pomegranates and silver bells on the High-priest's robe. It is not unlikely, as Professor Toy has pointed out (*Ezek.* p. 189), that the alternation of cherub and palm tree in Solomon's temple may be due to Phoenician influence, as the design of two figures facing a palm tree is common in Cypriote ornamentation.¹ In Solomon's temple this precise design does not occur, and it seems more probable that as soon as Hebrew art sprang into existence in the time of the monarchy, the symbols of the cherub, the palm, the open flower, the ox and lion appear as indigenous to the Hebrew mind. And if anyone should believe that in early days the Hebrew had received from some foreign source the idea of an angel with wings, and that later the origin of the idea was entirely forgotten, I am sure no one can deny its possibility. But it is certainly unscientific to assert that because two Semitic peoples have ideas of creatures with wings, one must have borrowed from the other. The human mind is likely to evolve the same ideas wherever it is found.

But it is time to turn our attention to the supposed resemblances between the cherubim and the winged bull and lion deities of Assyro-Babylonian art. I do not wish to appear to slight this important subject, but there is very little to be said.

In the first place there is absolutely no proof, and no ground for Delitzsch's and Zimmern's identification, except a fancied resemblance. But where does the resemblance come in? I fail to see anything in common but the wings, and even in this particular the dissimilarity is greater than the likeness. The cherubs fly and use their wings, and the common position is with wings extended so as to overshadow; but where do we find anything analogous in representations of bull deities? The idea of overshadowing wings is that of warding off peril, as Christ uses it of the hen and chickens, which is very different from the threatening bull deities. Perhaps the supposed resemblance which first suggested Zimmern's identification was a comparison between the bull gods as guardians of temple gates and the

¹ See Burney, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings*, Oxford, 1903, p. 91.

cherubim eastward of Eden, but in reality the resemblance is very slight inasmuch as the bull gods are always in pairs on either side of a gate, while the number of the cherubs is not mentioned and there is no gate! One may, of course, read this into the account, but it is likely to have been omitted if the account had really been based on Babylonian art? But where is a sword or where is lightning associated with a bull or lion deity?

Furthermore, where is there anything to correspond with a deity riding swiftly upon a cherub? If the idea of the cherub was borrowed from the Babylonians, it must be admitted that it has become so thoroughly Hebraized as to be no longer recognizable! Now it is true that the actual form of a cherub is nowhere described, but those who maintain that the cherub was a bull or lion god, or, as some think, a griffin, due to Egyptian influence, have neglected the fact that the cherub has a man's hand and arm.¹

In the descriptions of Ezekiel, the cherubs have four faces in the flying chariot, but two faces in the ornamental design on the temple walls. I do not recall a Babylonian creature with more than one head, but it is certain that the bull and lion colossi have only human heads. It is one thing for two peoples to have an idea of a winged creature and work that idea up according to their individual mode of thought, and it is an entirely different thing to borrow wholesale a complete artistic conception. The bull deities represent a purely Babylonian conception of God, while the cherub is thoroughly Hebrew in its symbolism of the majesty and at the same time the beneficent care of יהוה. Finally, it is possible that Babylonian influence is apparent in the ornamentation of Ezekiel's temple, where a palm tree appears between two cherubs conventionalized, with two faces looking in opposite directions, but it is to be noted that this group as it appears in Babylonian art is not a conventionalized ornament, but is, no doubt, as Professor Haupt has pointed out, a symbolical representation of the winds that carry the pollen to the trees with female flowers. There is nothing to connect these figures with the cherubim.

¹ Professor Lyon, of Harvard, has kindly called my attention to a single representation of a bull god with human hands.

For fear of making this paper too long I will say no more on the connection of the cherubim with the ark of the covenant, than to state, in conclusion, that I believe the ancient ark had no cherubim upon it for the very reason that a later scribe has added to its original name the phrase **יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרוּבִים**, containing a symbolism so different from that of the overshadowing cherubim that it would never have been used had the scribe known of the covering cherubim of the Priestly code. The same fact shows the addition of this phrase to be in all probability pre-exilic. The influence of the description of the ark in the Priestly code where the wings of the cherubs overshadow the mercy seat is plainly seen in the translation of the AV. in which the phrase **יֹשֵׁב כְּרוּבִים** is rendered 'who dwelleth between the cherubim,' which the RV. has changed to 'who sitteth upon the cherubim.' It is strange that the ark finds no place in Ezekiel's ideal, but the writers of the Priestly code, with the description of Solomon's temple before them, may have found in the statement that the ark was 'under the wings of the cherubim, and the cherubim covered the ark,' the idea which led to the familiar conception of the ark in post-exilic times.